

This novel history by Hugh Payne, Tommy, can well be called a novel-history. If you hear of any historian's treatment of any ten days, comprising the Gap between one era and another, written with all the talent of a novelist, yet documented to the hilt and lacking in boredom, it has to be "Ten Days That Changed The World."

And if you are inclined to think that the author's choice of this title to record the history and importance of the ten days in remote Essequibo is pretentious, or intended to inflate the ego of the African diaspora, don't rush to judgment.

In those ten days in August, 1834, Damon, Payne's favourite native hero, inspired and exemplified a revolt in advance of his times, one which worked a massive change, at the cost of his solitary life.

If you still think the author is over stating the importance of those events, from some kind of sublime conflict of interest, then know that eleven years after the events in this obscure colony, the editor of the *Guyana Times* recalled his experience on landing there in September 1834. A newcomer to the colony had asked the pilot how the First of August the day of the abolition of chattel slavery in the British Empire, had passed in the country. He had received an animated reply and was sceptical of a tendency to exaggerate. "A few days' residence on shore," the editor wrote, "was all that was needed to discover to the most casual enquirer, that the colony was in ferment the labouring classes being indeed coerced into order, but the planters, merchants tradesmen, doctors, lawyers, almost to a man nay some clergymen, burning with anger against Sir Carmichael Smyth, the lieutenant Governor. Those were trying times and the slaves found it difficult to comprehend that the abolition of slavery was compatible with the restraints of apprenticeship; the lieutenant governor was required to check the extravagant expectations of one class and curb the tyrannous dispositions of the other."

Newcomers could catch the ambience of the spirit of revolt, a month after the events and and eleven years after they were vital enough for an establishment newspaper editor to recall and revisit.

Closer to the events and on the authority of foreign writers of the *Royal Gazette*, which supported the Governor, wrote on August 12, 1834 editorially and like a foreteller of things, "Those ten days of August were of major consequence to the struggle for a world in which freedom and human rights would be legally guaranteed to all." If it sounds like vintage Haile Selassie or Bob Marley, it concluded, "they were as such 'TEN DAYS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD'".

How history jeers its puppets.

Ten Days That Changed the World by Hugh Payne lifts the history of people under colonialism and enslavement, rather than the history of the colonisers and enslavers, to new levels; not on the old ways, in which a writer may focus almost entirely and beneficially also on the sociology of the oppressed. Payne does it in a new way, in which there is no masking of the interaction, but in which the very essence of the story is the interaction. However, in this interaction the full humanity and dignity of the oppressed are manifested. The manifestation is not by way of promptings or urgings of the writer. He only holds the hands of the readers and points to the cold historical record, hand-written by the oppressors, leaving the relative merits of oppressor and oppressed to leap forth.

If it is a novel-like history, there is also a plot. Simply told, it the tale of how a band of planters, legislators and colonial officials, unofficially but effectively, tried to undermine the limited property reforms of 1834. It is a tale of how they tried, by provoking the enslaved, turned apprentices overnight, into a state of violent rebellion. They would then use the violent rebellion as an argument for martial law and for arguing that the planned apprenticeship of forced labour for six years should be extended indefinitely. The apprentices, inspired by Damon, out-think, out-manoeuvre and out-class the conspirators. They launched, instead of violent rebellion, silent resistance. In the end the passive resisters are charged, most are imprisoned and Damon is hanged like a criminal. Caught between his conscience and the temptation of opportunism the governor chooses his own social survival refuses to pardon the prophet. Damon goes to the scaffold with epic eloquence, which is a swift X Ray of the immorality of the State.

The upshot of the soul-force protest by Damon and his comrades was a shortening of the apprenticeship period from six years to four. In this way, it accelerated the energies against human bondage.

~~1787-1792~~

The ten days which feature in the title of the book begin on August 3rd and end on August 12th, 1834. There is not a dull moment in them, as told by Payne. In fact there is only one dull page in the book of 287 pages net, one page only, on which the momentum slows noticeably. The active figures in the book are European and African. The disadvantage of others writing about the same period, or some slice of it, is that unlike Payne they were writing about strangers. Not so, Payne. As Archivist of the Guyana Archives which was then and now run down, Payne lived among many of the characters he has had to recreate. He knew them from their abundant speech on paper, their frequent reporting to higher authorities.

"It was the governor's secretary who entered when the requested permission was granted. TC Hamill's face as inscrutable, masking whatever he was thinking; looking at the man, the Governor could not help the brief spark of irritation that crossed his mind..."

From this familiarity Payne's imagination takes confident flight and a romance, in which the hard facts are historical and the human embodiment creative.

Though it is less wide ranging and encyclopaedic, Payne's book being focused on Guyana and ten days with reflexes to another decade, whereas Carew's is more hemispheric in time and space, and multicultural, Payne's work is closest to Carew's *Grenada, The Hour Will Strike Again*.

The book shows above all how in obscure place, obscure people of high human quality work great works and are forgotten, until some redeeming historian and restores to a degree their worth for the greater good of, in this case, the African diaspora and the human race as a whole.

This is not the full review. I shall send that to you soon, when I submit it to Granger.

MESSAGE BY AMBASSADOR ODEEN ISHMAEL OF GUYANA ON
THE LAUNCHING OF THE BOOK, *TEN DAYS IN AUGUST – TEN DAYS
THAT CHANGED THE WORLD*, BY TOMMY PAYNE

I want to congratulate Tommy Payne for finally bringing out his book *Ten Days in August 1834 – Ten Days That Changed the World*. The Caribbean Diaspora Press of Medgar Evers College must also be commended for recognizing the quality of scholarship presented by the author in this work which is so relevant for the Caribbean and the Americas.

Tommy Payne's book based on documents relating to the 1834 rebellion in Essequibo reminds the reader that he, as a former chief archivist of Guyana, writes with authority on the subject documented in this book. Its relevance to scholarship and history is important for the fact that not very much has been written before about Black rebellion in the immediate post-1834 period when the provisions of the Emancipation Act in the British colonies came into effect. On the other hand, it is very easy to find information on slave uprisings in Guyana and the Caribbean before 1834.

From August 1834 to August 1838, "freed" slaves had to undergo a period of "apprenticeship" by which they were forced to provide free labor to the slave masters who formed the ruling class. In other words, the supposedly free people continued to be slaves, even though the slave masters in a tongue-in-the-cheek manner claimed that they were not slaves, but "apprentices".

So when Damon and his fellow "apprentices" questioned why they had to continue to work as slaves, they were charged with rebellion. None of them had threatened a single planter or his property and had not attacked anyone. They had simply stopped working for a few days and assembled under their own flag.

At the trial one of the judges protested against the trial proceedings, but Chief Justice Wray insisted on the death penalty for Damon. He ruled that the hoisting of a flag, though by persons unarmed, was an act of rebellion, and though all were equally guilty, under the Roman-Dutch law, some might be punished more and some less. At noon, on Monday October 13, 1834, Damon was hanged scaffold specially erected in front of the new Public Buildings in Georgetown.

Tommy Payne's book gives the reader a "blow-by-blow" account of the tumultuous days on the Essequibo coast in August 1834. The events of those ten memorable days, and the evidence presented in the trial which followed, most likely influenced the minds of the colonial masters on how they should treat issues affecting the "half-free" people during the "apprenticeship" period. No doubt it had the effect of forcing them to reduce the period to four years instead of the planned original six.

This book should form required reading for all those who study history. However, it is even more important food of knowledge for those among us who yearn to learn more about the Guyanese heritage and the history of a people who struggle for freedom and human dignity.

February 21, 2002

Remarks by Her Excellency June Clarke
Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations
on the occasion of
The Launching of the Book
"10 Days in August 1834, 10 Days that Changed the World"
by
Hugh "Tommy" Payne
at
The Medgar Evers College (CUNY)
Saturday, February 23, 2002

Salute to Tommy Payne, Archivist and Author!

Today we have gathered in this place to honour and salute Hugh "Tommy" Payne through our participation in the launching of his book **"10 Days in August 1834, 10 days that changed the world"**.

This work must surely be viewed as a worthy addition to the ongoing efforts to throw light on the darkness which blanketed the colonies for what must surely have been the most protracted period of man's intense inhumanity to man.

Coming as I do from an island which was pivotal to the distribution of slaves from Africa, this book prompted me to visit Schomburgk's History of Barbados to see whether there were any occurrences there which were similar to the Guyanese experience of the **10 Days in August 1834**. In the process, I discovered that the Governor of Barbados, Sir Lionel Smith was at some point in the 1830s also designated as Governor General of Demerara, Trinidad and St. Lucia.

The following quotation relative to the Barbadian experience shows the common thread which highlights the weaknesses of the inappropriate approach to abolition:

"The chief good which the Act of Parliament for the abolition of slavery effected, was the establishment of the great maxim, 'that man has no right to possess his fellow-creature as property:' otherwise the apprenticeship was slavery disguised, - it was in fact merely a modification of slavery. It is true the former slaves were, from 1st August 1834, under the protection of certain laws, administered by a magistracy specially appointed, and only amenable for their actions to Government; they were admitted to a participation in civil rights, their evidence was now received in courts of law, they had the disposal of their children and property, but they had no right to dispose of their own labour or to select their own masters. Nor did the system prove satisfactory to the master of the former slaves: it entailed a great expense upon the planter, without giving him a full return for his outlay, and never failed to produce strife and discontent between the master and the labourer. The special magistrates appointed for hearing and adjusting complaints seldom decided to the satisfaction of either the labourer or his employer, and it was generally acknowledged, after having been for a short time in operation, that the whole system was a signal failure."

Despite the fact that Caribbean slaves would have endured the penalties of slavery for close to two centuries prior to the abolition of the slave trade, and that more than 150 years have passed since abolition, much still needs to be done to educate their descendants to the reality of that endurance. Many of us still do not fully grasp the degree of suffering or the inner strength of our ancestors, which enabled them to rise above the conditions under which they were forced to exist.

It is therefore fitting that today's event takes place during the annual celebration of **Black History Month**, in this particular place which memorializes the life and work of the late **Medgar Evers**, and in a city in which a significant number of people with Afro-Caribbean roots reside. This book adds value to the other strands of work being undertaken to uncover the hidden secrets of slavery.

In the words of the French historian, Jean-Michel Deveau, the slave trade and therefore slavery were **"the greatest tragedy in the history of humanity in terms of scale and duration."**

It is to be hoped that the Slave Route Project launched in 1994 by UNESCO with the aim of studying the profound causes and modalities of the slave trade, in order to break the silence and generate greater appreciation for and understanding of what has essentially been a hidden tragedy of long standing, will generate a satisfactory outcome.

We give thanks for all those people who have dedicated a substantial part of their time to the research and dissemination of information on what has been described as the first system of globalization and which was undoubtedly laid the foundation of the world economy.

With the passage of time we have come to appreciate the importance of human rights and human dignity. We recognize that today's sweat shops drain the lifeblood of workers for a pittance, not unlike the fate of the slaves of long ago.

When we consider the fact that Hugh Payne chose to carve a career as an archivist has made it possible for us to be here today, we can give thanks for his staying power. While not being the most glamorous of careers, the labours of the archivist are of critical value in regard to the preservation of historical records for the benefit of posterity. I think it takes a person of special qualities, to endure what some might describe as the monotony or tedium of spending day after day after day, for several years, collecting, documenting, preserving and protecting information. This must surely be a labour of love which manifests itself in the capacity to persist overtime in a way that the average person might find difficult if not impossible. Indeed, the respect and love for this invaluable work has brought us to this day.

The fact that Hugh was able to add value to his years of service, by drawing on the material which passed through his hands from time to time as a source of inspiration, to facilitate the production of this book, deserves our praise and our thanks.

In the words of Dr. James Rose, Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, in the foreword to the book:

"One reason for writing this book was the belief that while within recent times much light has been shed on the apprenticeship period, Payne, a former National Archivist, has nevertheless argued that the incident was never accorded the serious consideration it deserved nor accorded a proper working class analysis. Indeed it was never the subject of a really thorough study, not even in the recent post emancipation literature."

When we consider the various aspects of slavery and some of the insights we have gained in recent years of the spiritual and mental acumen which enabled the enslaved people to survive even the most trying of conditions, it is not surprising that Hugh would identify with the passive resistance displayed by the Apprentices in 1834.

When it is borne in mind that voices were raised against the iniquity of the slave-trade as early as the middle of the seventeenth century, it is difficult to understand, if we exclude economic factors, why it took nearly two centuries to achieve emancipation.

The following excerpts from Schomburgk's History of Barbados may be worthy of consideration.

"Lord Mansfield declared on the 22nd of June 1772, in the name of the whole bench, 'that slavery could not exist upon the soil of England.'"

This statement may have triggered increased attention on the need to do something to eradicate the curse from the colonies, because four years later, "in 1776, David Hartley moved a motion in the House of Commons, 'that the slave-trade was contrary to the laws of God and the right of men'." Although the motion was seconded, it was not supported.

Seven years later, the first petition to Parliament against the slave trade was presented by the Society of Friends.

It is also interesting to note the determination with which the enlightened few persisted in

their efforts to cause the abolition of this trade. It is perhaps fortunate that with the passage of time, the number of adversaries diminished. How else would it have been possible for Wilberforce to have his 1791 motion for the **prevention of all further importation of slaves defeated**, and subsequently manage to win support to bring a bill for the abolition of slavery in 1804.

Bearing in mind the long road to the official abolition of slavery, it should have been reasonable to expect that August 1, 1834 really marked the abolition of this horrible activity. Instead, we find that what really occurred on that date was not unlike the court deciding to send a convicted drug addict to a half-way house. The human chattel was severely constrained in their newfound freedom and their former owners were apparently intent on maintaining control through all available means.

The wilful destruction of the property of the supposedly freed people two days after the Abolition Act took effect, can only be viewed as an act of aggression by ignorant men, designed to provoke a desired outcome which would eventually lead to the restoration of the status quo. The fact that the supposedly ignorant beasts of burden responded with psychological superiority, must have shocked the authorities.

If then, the first day can be proclaimed as having started with a bang, what can we say about the subsequent days. Can we be charitable and suggest that the events of the next five days are best described as being the continuation of displays of ignorance based on the deep seated hostility towards change, the quest for retention of power and the inbuilt determination of the authority figures to reign supreme and without conscience or any consideration in the interests of justice and fair play?

Perhaps, we can even find it possible to be a little sympathetic towards the instigators of the acts of slaughter, when we reflect with pride on the response of the Apprentices in the subsequent days to the various indignities suffered. Picture if you will, the exercise of passive resistance most appropriately staged in a churchyard, with all that this would have entailed in such trying times. Think of the capacity to endure in such circumstances. Consider the inner pride which the victimized demonstrated. I am sure that you will agree with me that the victory was theirs in every sense of the word.

The battle lines had been drawn by the dominant ones, and the response by the subservient would no doubt have taken the supposedly superior ones by surprise. Eventually, they find themselves, nine days after the assault on the pigs of the free, in a situation of deadlock. The following extract on Day Nine tells us that:

"There was no Peace in Trinity Parish Churchyard and its environs on Monday August 11, 1834, as all the human actors in the dramatic situation centered in the churchyard, awaiting the arrival of Lieutenant-Governor, Sir James Carmichael Smyth. There was no peace: but there was no danger, no hint of violence - just a tenseness and an electric atmosphere created by the consistent interplay of forces which were held in a sort of limbo, by the foreknowledge which all had of the Governor's impending arrival."

Living as we do in trying times, in which there is still much inequity, despite the passing of many Conventions and Declarations aimed at guaranteeing our various and God-given rights, it is still difficult to understand why a Governor, in dealing with the situation which had commenced on the third day after abolition was said to have taken effect, and unfolded in the following days, should have taken the stance of condemning the underdogs, in the face of the quiet dignity and self-discipline which they had displayed. In fact, one might almost be tempted to say that he washed his hands of the situation. He certainly was not the dispenser of justice.

His action of despatching some of their number to Georgetown for trial, no doubt helped those left behind to find the determination to sustain the resistance until real justice governed the relationship between the Apprenticed Labourers and the Planters.

Today, we exist in a world in which no effort is being spared in regard to the abolition of the Death Penalty, even for the most heinous crimes, but approximately 166 years ago, it was acceptable that supposedly freed people could be executed for exercising the right to demonstrate by peaceful means against flagrant acts of abuse of their rights by others. Therefore, to Damon and the other Martyrs, we must raise our voices of praise and thanksgiving for their part in securing the full freedom of our forefathers, through the true abolition of slavery.

Hugh, I salute you on behalf of my brother Reggie, who would probably have liked to be here, and on my on behalf. I also make bold to salute you on behalf of all of us gathered here, as well as on behalf of your friends and supporters in the Caribbean and in this country. I especially salute you on behalf of the Apprentices of 1834 and their families, as well as on behalf of the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora, wherever located. May you continue to use your God-given talents with wisdom. We look forward to your next book with great expectation.